

JACKDAW

FOR REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

JULY 2024



FREE

LAND & FREEDOM

The slogan 'Land and Freedom' has long been an anarchist slogan. It is not surprising that land is a key demand. Rural land workers represented the majority of the working population well into the 20th century in much of the world. Land ownership was concentrated in the hands of a few large landowners and people struggled to survive under this semi-feudal system. And it is still an important demand for many peasants and agricultural labourers around the world.

The Mexican anarchist communist Ricardo Flores Magon explains why land is crucial:

"We want bread for all. We consider it absurd that a few people should possess the earth, and the many not have a place to lay down their heads for rest. We want, then, that the land be accessible to all, just the same as the air, the light, the warm sun rays are there for all creatures on earth. We consider it absurd that those who neither toil nor produce should enjoy all at the expense of those who till and toil and have a life of misery..."

However, Magon made it clear that land was directly linked to liberty: (CONT
INSIDE)



VOICE OF THE ANARCHIST COMMUNIST GROUP

LAND & FREEDOM (CONT)

"We think that political liberty is a beautiful lie so long as it has not for its basis economic liberty and towards the conquest of that liberty our steps are directed".

Kropotkin also explained why a demand for land is so important. Land is basically part of the means of production. If workers do not have access to land they are unable to support themselves and must sell their labour to the capitalist/landowner. The revolution is therefore about taking over land and other means of production.



The 1936-39 revolution in Spain provides one of the best examples of what can be achieved by workers when they take over the land. The revolution on the land was more extensive and more radical than that in the urban areas. Not only were Spain's landowners rich and powerful but they were also notoriously conservative and authoritarian. They had opposed reform in every way, and had over the decades had financed violent suppression. Collectivisation of the land was extensive covering almost two thirds of all the land in the Republican zone. In all, between five and seven million peasants were involved, the major areas being Aragon where there were 450 collectives, the Levant (the area around Valencia) with 900 collectives and Castile (the area surrounding Madrid) with 300 collectives.

In the villages workshops were set up where the local trades-people could produce tools, furniture, etc. Bakers, butchers, barbers and so on also decided to collectivise. (Source: Kevin Doyle www.struggle.ws/talks/spain_feb99.html)

Relevance Today?

The fight for land is as relevant today, both in urban and rural areas. In many ways the UK land ownership system is still feudal, with large tracts of land owned by the Crown, the aristocrats, and the Church. Added to this mix are now corporations and wealthy individuals. Much land is owned by the State, which in theory is public, but in fact we have little or no control over how this land is used. The only way we will be able to meet our needs for food, housing, green spaces, community facilities and nature is for the land to be in our hands. Only then will we have both economic and political freedom.



WHO OWNS LONDON?

Property developers have been gobbling up land in London and the rest of Britain for decades, often from local authorities and other 'public' bodies. It is the value of the land that makes up the major part of the value of the buildings on it, 70% of residential properties on average. It is a major source of wealth and power and gives owners control over how that land is used. Unfortunately, as land is largely in private hands, it is used to make a profit for the owner rather than for the common good. We can see this all over London as property developers buy up chunks of London for 'redevelopment', putting up skyscrapers and other tall buildings, vandalising local neighbourhoods and bringing pollution and disruption to local communities.



The Crown and aristocracy have been the traditional owners of London, with huge slices of central London in their portfolio. However, corporations are now overtaking them. Canary Wharf Holdings (Qatar and Brookfield-registered in Bermuda), is number one on the list of Who Owns London (see: www.propertyweek.com/data/who-owns-london/5088280.article). Other corporations with major holdings include Aviva, a British insurance company and BNP Paribas, a French

bank. Foreign governments are also targeting London. Kuwait is the 16th biggest landowner and even owns City Hall. Qatar, in addition to their Canary Wharf property owns the Shard, 20% of Heathrow, 10% of London Stock Exchange, Harrods, the Olympic Village, and the massive Chelsea Barracks development.

However, so-called public bodies rival the corporations in the amount of London they own. This includes the City of London and Transport for London, the second and third biggest landowners. Local authorities own around 20% of London land. Though much of this land, in theory, is used for the public good, eg parks, schools and council homes, these bodies are increasingly becoming property developers themselves. Transport for London is behind the massive Earl's Court development and the City of London built so many office and luxury flat towers that the older streets and buildings are swamped, with communities displaced.

Fortunately, people are fighting back. These victories will hopefully encourage others to resist the property developers' plans.

LOCAL RESIDENTS RESIST

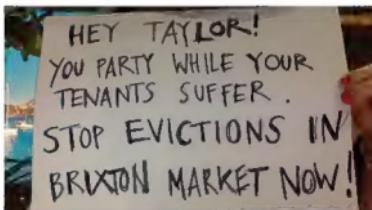
Islington

Islington residents gained a temporary victory when they stopped an office development going ahead. Residents from Clerc Street, Paul Street and Epworth Street demonstrated at Islington Town Hall against the plans by Lion Portfolio to demolish the supported housing block Castle and Fitzroy House, where many disabled and elderly people live, and replace it with yet another office block two stories higher with two new basement levels. The residents also argue that it would take 1.7 million trees to offset the carbon emissions from the office block. In addition, they are concerned about the loss of light. As one resident said: "We know it's all about money- we don't come into it."

Brixton

Fight the Tower was formed in 2020 in Brixton. It finally won its campaign to have the building of Taylor Tower withdrawn in late July 2023. Hondo Enterprises, owned by Texas billionaire Taylor MacWilliams, developer and part-time DJ, wanted to build this 20 story luxury office block on Pope's Road. It would have stood as twice as tall as other buildings in the surrounding area.

This is not the first time that residents and traders have had to fight the plans of developers. MacWilliams bought most of the market in 2018 from London and Associate Properties, who had in turn bought it from another real estate company, APL Ocean Ltd in 2007. (LAP is involved in the Orchard Square development in Sheffield, which they are now seeking to sell for a whopping profit, despite having received almost £1 million in public money). They presented redevelopment plans in 2009 but this was successfully resisted.



Residents from the campaign: "Today we celebrate, but tomorrow we organise to take our neighbourhoods and cities back."

Hondo, as the main owner of the market, will not go away. It is time that Brixton and areas in other cities, are put in the hands of local communities. They need to be managed collectively for the common good, rather than being bought and sold like squares on a Monopoly Board.

For more info see: (See: www.savenour.com/)

Thamesmead: Refurbish, don't demolish for housing and climate justice

Residents of Peabody-owned Lesnes Estate in Thamesmead have joined forces with housing activities from Housing Rebellion and Refurbishment, Not Demolition to save their homes. The campaign has been going on for months and has escalated to include an occupation and regular activities. Empty homes are being done up and homeless families moved in. It is an excellent example of what can be done when housing campaigners, who themselves may have experienced a similar situation, support local communities in their struggles.

The actions of Peabody shows that all landowners, including so-called social ones, only have their own interest at heart. The whole estate- land and the homes on it, should be taken under community ownership. Only then will people have the power to make decisions about their homes and their future.



RENT RISES



Landlords profit, tenants suffer

"London Renters Union members are reporting huge rent rises of as much 30% or even 50%. Landlords and estate agents are using the cost of living crisis as an excuse to squeeze tenants and boost profits. They get richer while the rest of us suffer"

<https://londonrentersunion.org/rent-rises/>

Housing costs already make up a very high percentage of people's spending. Welfare advisors recommend that people spend no more than 30% of their take-home pay on rent. In London, and most other cities, this is impossible. In London people pay almost 50% (or more) of their income on rent and it is worse for those on lower pay. The cost of a new rental agreement rose by 12% this past year. Meanwhile, average earnings have increased by only 6%.

There is a shortage of privately rented accommodation due to lack of public housing and the increase in demand from those unable to buy their own home. In 2020-2021, of the 20,000 + homes completed only 3,330 were built by local authorities and housing associations. Even those properties may be beyond the means of many and some will be for shared ownership. Housing associations often charge higher rents than councils, and even council tenants have seen rent rises. However, the shortage is also due to London landlords renting to tourists at vastly inflated prices. Renters are forced to share flats, living in cramped and often poorly maintained conditions.

Meanwhile, many landlords make huge profits.

"The UK's largest listed residential landlord Grainger reported a huge boom in profit before tax of 96 per cent off the back of soaring demand" (<https://www.cityam.com/private-landlord-titan-graingers-profits-surge-by-96-per-cent-due-to-strong-rental-demand/>).

This is completely unacceptable. It doesn't make sense that landlords can put up rents just because people are desperate to find a place to live. But this is how the capitalist market works- an increase in demand leads to higher prices. Instead of housing being a right, it is a source of profit for those with enough money to buy up properties- the big corporations and buy-to-let landlords.

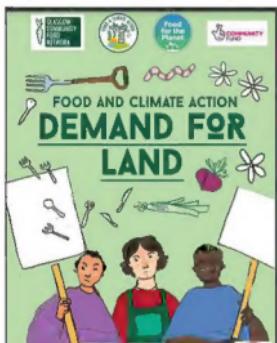
In an anarchist communist society, housing would be free to all- provided and maintained by all of us working together. It would be distributed according to need, so that people with larger households would get bigger places. The system of distribution would be fair and involve everyone in making decisions- not the market, not the landlord, not the State. And the housing you get would be secure. You would not own it as such but it is still yours while you want to live there.

Meanwhile, we need to fight against rent increases and landlord profiteering, as well as for more public and co-operative housing.

A place to start taking action is with the London Renters Union, an organisation controlled by its members and based on direct action (<https://londonrentersunion.org/>).

FOOD FOR ALL

The Covid pandemic showed up the failures of the capitalist food system. Food shortages and empty shelves made people more aware of where food comes from and how it is produced. Price increases and profiteering revealed the role supermarkets play in dominating the market. Tesco, the UK's biggest supermarket chain said pre-tax profits hit £2.3bn, up from £882m, while sales rose by 4.4% to £68.2bn



in the year to 24 February. Meanwhile, many people struggle to afford even low-quality food. As a result, some have decided to take things into their own hands. People all over the country are seeking food growing spaces, for allotments, community growing projects and market gardens. The waiting list for allotments in England has risen by 81% over the past 12 years as more than 150,000 people seek a place to grow fresh food.

There has been an upsurge in guerrilla gardening where people take over a site and grow food for the community and a massive increase in food growing projects mainly on local council-owned land. For example, Incredible Edible is just one network and they have 150 growing groups.

Social Farms and Gardens estimates that there are over 1,000 community food growing projects across the UK.

Hull is set to become the first council to give people the 'right to grow' on unused council land. This is largely the result of a campaign by a strong food growing movement in Hull. Many food campaigners think this is a good first step and would like to see all councils do this.

Other cities such as Glasgow have a Food Growing Strategy. However, it relies on groups identifying appropriate land and then applying for it. The Glasgow Community Food Network (GCFN) has produced a very useful document to help people address the problem of getting access to land. One issue is not even knowing who owns the land. Despite the requirement of all landowners to have registered their ownership by 2025, only 50% is known. Another obstacle is people having the knowledge, resources, and capacity to work out all the intricacies of getting hold of the land. There is not enough funding or support for people to go through what is a complicated process.

The other issue is there is not that much land available. Most land is in private hands. Councils usually prefer to sell off land to private developers and can easily take the land back if they want, so there is no long-term security. The only way to both get hold of land from the local council, and keep it, is to have strong grass roots organisation, based on local communities.

There is not even a right to grow policy in London. Campaigners from Incredible Edible and Sustain met in April to launch a campaign for such a right "which would require local authorities to maintain a free, accessible map of all public land that is suitable for community cultivation or wildlife projects. They would also need to make it straight-forward for community groups to secure free leases to cultivate the land, and allow those groups to bid for the land should the authority decide to sell it.

According to a study by CPRE, green spaces in poorer parts of England are less likely to be protected against being bulldozed and developed than those in more affluent areas, exacerbating the threat to urban food-growing spaces. Over the past decade, London has lost over 40 allotment sites to other projects, leading to increased waiting times for applicants for an average of four to five years" (<https://www.sustainweb.org/news/apr24-food-growers-rally-for-action-right-to-grow-summit/>).

Community food growing projects point to how we could be doing things in a future society. However, the vast majority of land is owned by corporations and large private landowners- urban and rural- to make huge profits for themselves. And land owned by the State- local or national- is not under our control. All land needs to be collectively controlled and managed, which means getting rid of capitalism and private property.

As the Digger Winstanley said: "Was the earth made to preserve a few covetous, proud men to live at ease, and for them to bag and barn up the treasures of the earth from others, that these may beg or starve in a fruitful land; or was it made to preserve all her children?"



COMMUNITY LAND OWNERSHIP

Worth fighting for?

Anarchist communists believe that land will only serve the needs of everyone if it is owned communally, by all. This does not mean by the State but directly by the people. Oddly enough, this is also the position of Community Land Scotland: "Land ownership is the most important factor in how land is used and who benefits from its potential." They represent the quite significant number of community landowners, now around 3% of total land, mainly in rural, but also urban areas. The various land reform bills which were passed since Scottish devolution in 1999 all contributed some way to making community land buy-outs possible.



It is not easy for a local community to take over. Many don't have the time or experience to get fully involved. They are also operating within the broader capitalist system, so will find many obstacles to doing what they want to do. However, those who have gone down that road, would not turn back the clock. One crofter on the Isle of Lewis said that he had originally not been keen to move to community ownership, didn't see the point. However, now he is all in favour. He thinks of his grandfather who came back from WWII expecting to get land after the sacrifices he had made, but that didn't happen- the landowner's hold was a strong as ever. He says: "My grandfather would be so proud, the land is ours".

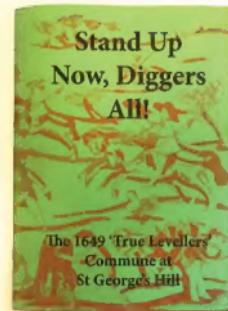
English law has no community right to buy, or much of any land reform legislation. The Localism Act of 2011 gives some very weak rights for communities to bid for public assets before they are sold off, eg libraries. The local authority can transfer these to a group of people for a nominal sum, but the expertise and time required are prohibitive and this has not been used very often. It is just a way of letting local councils off the hook, expecting volunteers to run for example a library rather than pay staff. And if the land is really valuable, then land will be sold off to property developers.

Community Right to Buy may be a useful tactic and will give people experience in self-organisation as long as there is enough logistic and financial support. However, it cannot replace the full-scale collectivisation of the land, where no land is actually owned, but managed for the benefit of all. This can only be brought about by a social revolution.

THE DIGGERS

Fight for land justice

"Those that Buy and Sell Land, and are landlords, have got it either by Oppression, or Murther, or Theft." Gerrard Winstanley.



In April 1649 a group of thirty to forty people occupied the common land at St George's Hill in Surrey. They planted crops there. They hoped they would be joined by five thousand others, but this was not to be.

Leading lights in this group, which came to be known as Diggers, were William Everard a soldier who had been in Cromwell's New Model Army, and known for his radical opinions, and Gerrard Winstanley, a small cloth merchant, who had been ruined by the economic depression of the early 1640s. In 1648 and 1649 he published four pamphlets, which became successively more radical. He argued that the Earth was a common treasury, and that the land belonged to all rather than to rich individuals.

The Diggers' cultivation of the waste ground on Saint George's Hill was met with fierce opposition by local vested interests, including the local parson and the lord of the manor. They were attacked and beaten, their houses burned, their crops uprooted and their tools destroyed. In July they were arrested and tried before the local magistrates. They were heavily fined, and their cattle confiscated. After a year of persecution, the Digger settlement was broken up. Attempts to set up similar settlements in other parts of England soon failed, and by 1650, the Digger movement had disappeared.

Yet the experience of Winstanley and the Diggers lives on. They were some of the first to question land ownership, eloquently expressed in Winstanley's visionary writings and in the direct action of cultivating the commons.

St George's Hill continued to be a site for struggles over gathering word and other commoning practices over the next 200 years. It eventually became a site for the homes of the wealthy, a thousand acre gated community with properties valued at between £15 to 30 million. The site is guarded by around-the-clock private security patrols. This is on land stolen from the commons by a succession of aristocrats, and financed by capital accumulated from colonial exploitation through the East India Company and in the Caribbean.

There is a stark contrast between the generous vision of the Diggers and the greed and avarice now displayed at St George's Hill.

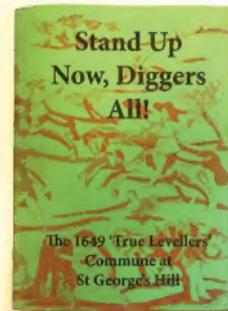


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Anarchist Communist Group

THE GOOSE AND THE COMMON

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common,
But turns the bigger robber loose
Who steals the common from off the goose.

Chorus (after each verse):

Whose is the Kingdom, the power and the glory?
For ever and ever, will it be the same old story?

The law demands that we atone
When we take things we do not own,
But leaves the lords and ladies fine
Who take things that are yours and mine.

The poor and wretched don't escape
If they conspire the law to break.
This must be so, but they endure
Those who conspire to make the law.

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common,
And geese will still a common lack
Till they go and steal it back.

PEOPLE'S LAND POLICY

**Towards
A Manifesto
for
Land Justice**



For a copy of the manifesto, email: peopleslandpolicy@gmail.com

Website at www.peopleslandpolicy.org

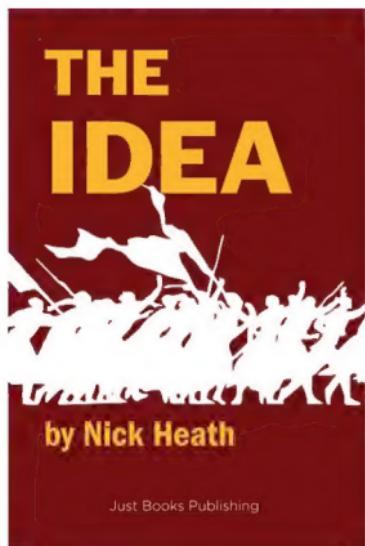


Anarchist Communist Group

The Anarchist Communist Group (ACG) is a revolutionary anarchist communist organisation which is dedicated to seeking a complete transformation of society, and the creation of anarchist communism.

This will mean the working class overthrowing capitalism, abolishing the State, getting rid of exploitation, hierarchies and oppression, and halting the destruction of the environment. To do this, we believe it is important to be organised.

We are committed to building an effective organisation that works towards the common goal of anarchist communism, in cooperation with other working class organisations and in grass roots campaigns. We strive to base all our current actions on the principles that will be the basis of the future society: mutual aid, solidarity, collective responsibility, individual freedom and autonomy, free association and federalism.



The Idea

Anarchist Communism, Past, Present & Future

Nick Heath

Available at Housmans.com



Stormy Petrel

Theoretical Journal of the Anarchist Communist Group



Anarchist Communist Group

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REVOLUTIONARY CLASS STRUGGLE NEWS